

Middle-aged fans, Limelitters have grand old reunion

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Staff Reviewer

Glenn Yarbrough and the Limelitters emerged once again from retirement Monday night for the "Limelitters Reunion '75" — or, as they jokingly called it, "The Limelitters' 39th Annual Consecutive Farewell Tour."

They were only half kidding; the Limelitters have staged more comebacks than Frank Sinatra and Maria Callas combined.

"Reunion" was an apt term for Monday's concert. The audience consisted primarily of old fans, many of them middle-aged, who gathered in groups during intermission to discuss the Limelitters' previous appearances in Seattle and to exchange apocryphal Limelitters anecdotes.

Vigorous applause greeted the opening bars of each of the old hits, which made up most of the program. When Yarbrough began "Baby, the Rain Must Fall," the audience responded with the same demented adulation that rock fans presently give to Elton John.

Like most reunions, this one featured a lot of the same old jokes and stories. Nostalgia, in fact, was a little more prominent than vocal skill. The Limelitters had their heyday in the late 1950's and early 1960's. They're still doing now what they were doing then, only not quite so well. The back-up group seems to get a little more extensive each year, as the trio relies less and less on their own individual voices and more on the "musical package" produced by a fair-sized band (four guitars, piano/organ, and drums).

The Limelitters still have a lot of the old magic, though, and judging from the reaction of the audience, they are very effective entertainers. Each of the three singers has not only a strong voice but a distinctive personality, which emerges clearly from the jokes and anecdotes which punctuate the songs. With three such personalities at work, there are very few dull moments.

Glenn Yarbrough, the most prominent of the Limelitters and the only singer of solo quality, does a lot of the talking as well as most of the singing. As the years go by, his resemblance to Santa Claus becomes more marked. His unusual voice has lost a few of the upper notes of his tenor range; most of the higher harmonies are unobtrusively provided by the back-up band, which frequently sings along with the trio. But the haunting and evocative quality of Yarbrough's voice still lends a kind of beauty to the poignant ballads which make up a large part of the Limelitters' repertoire.

The other two Limelitters, Lou Gottlieb and Alex Hassilev, both defer to Yarbrough's vocal ability. Gottlieb remarked wryly, "We're glad to be with you tonight; it's always exhilarating for Alex and me to be working again."

Gottlieb's outrageously pedantic sense of humor (he holds a Ph.D. from the University of California) provided most of the evening's funnier moments, particularly when he sang the old Flanders and Swann ditty, "Have Some Madeira, M'Dear," a song about a seductive old British gentleman whom Gottlieb impersonates with a great deal of flair.

The lighting in the Opera House was embarrassingly poor: whoever was running the spotlights was literally asleep at the switch. The spots leaped and staggered about the stage, rarely landing where they were supposed to, and often leaving the main performer in total darkness.